

Members of Nebraska Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee participated in a national affairs visit to Washington, D.C., July 6-10, urged Nebraska's Congressional delegation to do what they can to help secure the passage of a comprehensive new farm bill.

"As young farmers and ranchers we support passage of a farm bill that doesn't guarantee a profit, but protects farmers and ranchers from catastrophic occurrences," said Shelly Thompson, who co-chairs the Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee with her husband Thorpe.

"There is considerable risk involved in agriculture, but those risks are amplified for young people working to get their start in farming and ranching. A farm bill safety net is critical to those of us building our operations from the ground up."

The Thompsons are ranchers from Whitney.

In addition to passage of a farm bill, committee members advocate for the passage of legislation to fix (EPA) regulations governing above-ground oil storage on farms.

EPA's Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) oil spill regulations have been a source of contention since finalized in 2009. Nebraska Farm Bureau has since advocated for legislation that would raise the oil storage capacity threshold that triggers regulatory requirements.

"The original intent of the oil spill regulations was to govern large-scale, oil refinery type operations, not farms and ranches.

"Agriculture has no history of oil spills and raising the threshold for compliance would help eliminate costly regulatory requirements for young people in agriculture," said Thompson.

The president's new climate initiative was also on the minds of committee members. In late June the Administration released details of a climate plan that would impose deadlines for EPA to limit carbon dioxide emissions at U.S. power plants which could drive up energy costs for farmers. The proposal also includes new fuel economy standards on heavy-duty vehicles which could raise the cost and limit availability of new heavy-duty vehicles used on the farm and ranch.

"When it comes to climate-related initiatives, we favor efforts that focus on developing technologies and production practices rather than establishing additional regulations," said Thompson. "New regulations only put a greater burden on the economy and harm farmers and ranchers."

Members of the committee also shared support for funding U.S. Department of Agriculture inspections at U.S. horse processing facilities.

A Government Accountability Office report released last summer documented the harmful impact of processing restrictions noting the numerous and rising cases of horse abandonment and neglect since the last U.S. processing plant closed in 2007.

Funding for horse inspections is in question in Congress where votes removing USDA funding for horse inspection have advanced through the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

"Horse slaughter provides a much needed avenue for the removal of unwanted horses," said Thompson. "We know many animals have already suffered from starvation and abandonment due to the loss of a viable horse market. USDA-approved inspection at horse processing facilities allows for a humane end to these animals lives."

Representatives of the Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee met with all five members of Nebraska's Congressional delegation.

Nebraska Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee members visiting

Washington, D.C., in addition to Thompson and her husband, included Matt and Elizabeth Albrecht of Cozad; Tim and Stephanie Hruby of Hemingford; and Ben and Jamie Keep of Scotia.

The Nebraska Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee helps farmer and rancher members up to age 35 develop their leadership skills and provide them opportunities to socialize with their peers.